

Vote411 Voters' Mini-Guide

Fall 2021

Bethel Park School Director

This Voters' Mini-Guide is an excerpt of the online Vote411 Voters' Guide -- a project of the League of Women Voters. To see your entire ballot, visit Vote411.org.

The Bethel Park School District elects school board members "at large." Voters in the school district will have all 7 candidates on their ballots, and may vote for up to four (4) candidates.

Bethel Park School Directors are elected on behalf of the community to oversee the education of students in their jurisdiction. They serve as agents of the state legislature. They are responsible for curriculum and instruction management, all finances including development of annual budgets and levying of taxes and issuance of debt obligations when necessary; personnel; legal matters; management of facilities; and transportation of students as appropriate. Schools may include pre-K and career and technical schools. The school board consists of nine members who serve four-year terms of office without pay.

Term of office: 4 years

*All information in Vote411 Voters' Guides is submitted by the candidates and has not been edited or altered in any way. **The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh** has made every effort to enlist the participation of each candidate running for these positions. Candidates who would like to submit or update their written answers should contact vote411@lwvpgh.org.*





Sharon Janosik

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: info@bpp4p.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://www.bpp4p.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BPP4P>

Education: I graduated summa cum laude from Duquesne University with a BS in Professional Studies, Organizational Leadership and Communication; Temple University's Institute on Disabilities' Competence and Confidence: Partners in Policymaking (C2P2 or PiP); and the PEAL Center's Family Leadership Institute.

Qualifications for office: Co-founded district affiliate of PA Association for Gifted Education; founded advocacy and education group for Special Education; appointed by the Governor to the Special Education Advisory Panel; six years as a parent volunteer educational advocate; volunteer Family Leader with Families2Max.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: Providing summer learning programs to reinforce the key concepts taught during this pandemic year is going to be a great first step in addressing learning loss; that support might even be needed next summer. We can use a variety of federal funding programs to consider some after-school tutoring for students who still need help next year. Our experienced educators and administrators should be providing more review of foundational concepts, assessing which students have learning gaps, and targeting assistance to those students. Lastly, we need to strengthen and broaden our programs for mental health resources and social-emotional skills to support the wide variety of student concerns and responses to what has been a traumatic year for many.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: We cannot address problems we refuse to recognize and name, so continuing the work of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee is imperative to ensure every child feels safe, welcomed, accepted, and valued in our schools. Building a culture that celebrates the diversity of all of us is hard work that is never really done. Therefore, we need to build systems that include this focus as part of what we do as an educational system each day. We need to follow up with every student and their family after incidents are reported to ensure that they now feel safe in reporting any escalation, that their lived experience is believed, that retaliation is not occurring, and that they feel more safe, welcomed, and valued at school.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: The current legislation on charter and cyber schools must be overhauled to bring equity to the funding, regulations, and requirements between public districts and charter schools. All these entities should be meeting the same standards and expectations. As long as profit is a motive, children will lose. However, many students do well in charter and cyber-charter schools when they and their families are committed to providing the support and supervision necessary to access an environment that is often better for their disabilities, mental health concerns, or physical safety. It is imperative that public schools consider these needs and seek to improve their services so these families have more appropriate environments in district schools.



Dan Grzybek

Party: Dem, Rep

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: info@bpp4p.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://BPP4P.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BPP4P>

Education: I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 2017 with a Bachelor's in Chemical Engineering and minor in Economics; I am currently pursuing my Master's in Engineering at Purdue University with a concentration in Engineering Management

Qualifications for office: Engineer at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory (Bettis); Former Operations Manager at US Steel; Received emergency teaching certification during the pandemic and taught at NAMS, IMS, and BPHS; Mentors immigrant and refugee students at SHIM; PA Junior Academy of Science local and state judge.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: We need to analyze student performance on a case-by-case basis, looking at how often the student missed online classes, how their grades compared to previous years, and how engaged they are upon returning to school. Once students have been assessed, we must allocate our resources in an equitable manner. Students who have fallen behind should be given dedicated attention through avenues like individual tutoring and an extended school year. For the general student population that did not suffer as substantial a learning loss, we can compress content so they are able to move through lessons and focus on more integral topics as they are brought up to speed. I would rely on our experienced administrators and teachers to direct this effort.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: Measuring the success of efforts toward embracing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) can be rather difficult. It isn't as simple as evaluating changes in a math or ELA program, where you can simply look at the scores obtained on a standardized test. While measuring inclusion is hard, that doesn't mean it's impossible. I believe the best way to measure the success of our efforts is through surveys to students, faculty, and staff. I believe we should consult an expert in DEI to create said survey. Responses could be evaluated before and after the implementation of the DEI program to determine its effectiveness, focusing on any disparities in answers by responder race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: At first glance, charter schools seem like a good idea; they offer competition for public schools, more choices for families, and less bureaucracy. Sadly, the reality is not so positive. A 2019 PA study found that in a typical school year, PA charter students received, on average, 30 fewer instructional days in math and 12 fewer in reading than typical public school students. Charters divert funding from public schools while providing significantly worse educational outcomes to students. The mission of PDE is to ensure that every learner has access to a world-class education system that academically prepares them to succeed. The above data makes it clear that traditional public schools are the best way to accomplish that goal.



Sean Browne

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Campaign Web Site: <http://www.bpp4p.com/>

District: <https://www.bpsd.org/>

Education: B.A. in Physics and a B.S. in Secondary Education – 2013 California University of PA

Qualifications for office: Currently in my seventh year teaching physics, electronics, math and programming. Prior to this, I spent 15 years working as an electrician/programmer for companies that supply industrial automation solutions. My background in both education and STEM provides insight that will help guide decisions.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: The changes in how instruction is delivered brought about by the pandemic further laid bare the inequity of resources that was already present. Districts with the means to provide students with Chromebooks or iPads and already had staff trained in using online ILMS's were able to hit the ground running last March and lost little instructional time. In districts where these resources were not available, valuable instruction time was lost as districts scrambled to acquire computers for students and to train staff. Although I am not a fan of the current state of standardized testing, I feel that it could be beneficial to use these tests to identify those students that have fallen further behind and to direct resources to help them catch up.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: Finding accurate metrics to quantify the effectiveness of programs meant to reduce bullying or to address social and racial justice issues can be difficult. In the studies I have looked at, having students, peers and teachers respond to questionnaires can often shed light on the effectiveness of these programs and whether they are trending in the right direction.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: Although I believe parents should have alternative options, the current funding model oftentimes further exacerbates the inequity of resources and opportunity for financially struggling districts. I think the current model of for-profit cyber and charter schools carries with it the incentive for administrators of these schools to make academic decisions based on profitability and not necessarily what is best for students. Although parents should have choices, I do not think privatizing schools is the direction we want to be going.



Buffie Faes

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: buffie4bpsb@gmail.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://www.bpp4p.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BPP4P>

Education: I earned my bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from California University of Pennsylvania, graduating with honors in 2002. After a successful career in sales, I returned to school to complete my master's degree in Special Education, which I graduated magna cum laude in 2010.

Qualifications for office: I am employed as a life skills teacher at Chartiers Valley High School. I formerly held the position of Department Head of Special Education, and served as a chairperson for the Transition Coordinator Council of Allegheny County. I graduated from Bethel Park, as did my adult children.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: The Pandemic is hopefully a once in a lifetime event, and I do believe that with less focus on what the students were missing out on and more focus on what they could learn from this, the overall opinion may have been different. There really is no tool to measure education (or anything else, for that matter) in a pandemic. Regardless, I believe we need to implement various types of assessments, beyond traditional testing. One example is project based assessments, which absolutely measure knowledge and achievement, while using methods that reach more learners than traditional tests. Once data is collected, we can determine any deficits and design instruction accordingly to remediate.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: More importantly than just talking about diversity, equity and inclusion in all school buildings, we need to put our money where our mouths are. It is unfathomable that in 2021, we are still trying to create equity among all people. The only way to do this is to stop sweeping it under the rug, realize that we have differences, and embrace them. We need to be able to talk to our students in the school buildings (and hope that the same talks are happening at home). Education should serve the WHOLE child. We need more training for teachers and staff to recognize signs of bullying, as well as meaningful and continuous programs for students. Most importantly, we need family engagement to end bullying.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: Charter schools take funding from our public, but are not held to the same standards in achievement, and they can discriminate in the students they accept. Overall, they do not perform any better than public schools and should not be for profit.

Gail Hoppe

Party: Rep

Biographical Info:

This candidate has not responded.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: - no response -

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: - no response -

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: - no response -

James R. Means, Jr.

Party: Rep

Biographical Info:

This candidate has not responded.

Questions:

Q: The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?

A: - no response -

Q: Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?

A: - no response -

Q: Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.

A: - no response -

Rory E. Smith

Party: Rep

Biographical Info:

This candidate has not responded.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: - no response -

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: - no response -

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: - no response -